United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Memorandum

To: Mexican Wolf Recovery Coordinator, Southwest Region

Through: Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services

From: Regional Director, Southwest Region

Subject: Depredation Decision; Willow Springs Pack

Under the final 10(j) rule (50 CFR Part 17) of January 12, 1998, (Final Rule), the Interagency Management Plan of March 1998 (IMP), and the final Environmental Impact Statement of November 1996, three confirmed depredation incidents by the Willow Springs pack within the last 365 days triggers the need for management action, including whether individual wolves should be translocated or removed from the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area (BRWRA). My decision is to increase non-removal management efforts employed in the Willow Springs territory in an effort to limit additional livestock depredation behavior in the area.

Depredation History and Assignments:

The following depredation incidents involving members of the Willow Springs pack have occurred within the last 365 days:

1. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (Wildlife Services) investigated a depredation incident on March 10, 2014, of a dead cow within the Willow Springs pack's territory. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf-caused and estimated the time of death to be 5-7 days prior to the investigation. AM1185 was located near (<0.5 mile) the carcass from March 3, 2014, to March 7, 2014, based on Global Positioning System (GPS) points. In addition, AF1279 was located with AM1185 on the March 3, 2014 and March 10, 2014 flights. A young animal, MP1338 from the Willow Springs pack was located away from the pack near the estimated time March 3, 2014, of the depredation. Based on this information, the Interagency Field Team (IFT) determined that AM1185 and AF1279 of the Willow Springs pack were responsible for this depredation incident;

2. Wildlife Services investigated a depredation incident on March 22, 2014, of a dead cow within the Willow Springs pack's territory. The livestock producer originally thought the cow had died of non-wolf related causes, but a wolf AM1185 was captured in a coyote trap the following morning raised concern that the cow had died as a result of wolf-caused injuries. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and to have occurred within 5-7 days prior to the investigation. Prior to the estimated time of the incident, AM1185 was located approximately 4-6 miles from the depredation location. During the estimated time of the incident, AM1185 was located approximately 3-6 miles from the depredation location. Following the estimated time of the incident, AM1185 travelled further away from the depredation location (~10 miles). AM1185 was not located in the vicinity of the depredation incident until March 20, 2014. AM1185 was captured by a private trapper at the depredation site on March 22, 2014; no other collared wolves were in the area. AM1185 was uninjured and released by the IFT on the Gila National Forest approximately 3 miles from the depredation site the same day. Based on GPS and telemetry data, the IFT determined that an uncollared wolf or wolves, loosely associated with the Willow Springs pack, was responsible for this depredation incident;

3. Wildlife Services investigated a depredation incident on March 31, 2014, of an injured cow within the Willow Springs pack's territory (the cow was found within 1 mile of the March 10, 2014, depredation investigation site). The cow had to be euthanized by the livestock producer due to the extent of the injuries and to prevent further suffering. Wildlife Services confirmed the injuries to be wolf caused, and to have occurred approximately 5-7 days earlier. During and just after the estimated time when the injuries were determined to have occurred, GPS points place AM1185 in the area (0.3 to 3 miles from the carcass from March 24, 2014 to March 29, 2014). In addition, the IFT observed all three wolves (AM11185, AF1279, and mp1338) traveling together on March 28, 2014 from a helicopter. Based on this information, the IFT determined that AM1185, AF1279, and MP1338 of the Willow Springs pack were responsible for this depredation incident. Given that the cow was alive (with approximately 10 percent of the cow consumed), it could be hypothesized that only the younger and least experienced animal MP1338 was involved in the attack, but the telemetric and observational data available to the IFT suggested that all three wolves were traveling together during the estimated time of the attack. Based on this information, the IFT determined that AM1185, AF1279 and mp1338 of the Willow Springs pack were responsible for this depredation incident;

Management Measures:

The Willow Springs pack has not previously been responsible for depredation incidents. A range rider is contracted for the area of the depredations. The IFT is implementing hazing of the wolves from cattle. A diversionary food cache has been established in the area, and cattle are being moved away from the area as part of normal pasture rotations. These actions were initiated following the depredation incident on March 22, 2014, but were not fully in place until after the depredation incident on March 31, 2014. The Willow Springs pack has been documented on the diversionary food cache.

Decision:

I extend my sincere thanks to all those involved in this analysis and in implementing field efforts to protect livestock and conserve wolves. I make my decision in full consideration of the following:

1. The current Willow Springs pack was formed in 2011 by wild born female wolf 1279 and wild born male wolf 1185. Although some telemetric evidence of denning occurred in 2011, the IFT was unable to confirm the presence of pups or denning in the pack during 2011. The IFT documented denning behavior in 2012, but were unable to confirm pup survival. During 2013, the Willow Springs pack produced a minimum of 6 pups with at least three surviving through the end of 2013. Observations in March and April 2014 indicate that MP1338 and at least two uncollared pups are traveling with AM1185 and AF1279 sporadically. The Willow Springs pack is likely to produce pups within the next few weeks. This pack is important to achieving population goals.

2. The 1998 IMP states "attempts should be made to keep alpha females, females with young, or females showing signs of lactation in the population, when feasible, in order to maintain the integrity of the breeding segment of the population. Also, during the later stages of recovery (five or more packs), when other adults are removed from the population, females with young (< September 1) may be released or not controlled. Decisions to relocate or remove a wolf or wolves from the wild population will be based on criteria such as the number of established packs in the recovery area; the sex, age, and reproductive status of the animal(s); and other circumstances relevant to the specific situation."

3. In order to maintain the integrity of the breeding segment of the population, we have considered both the background and the genetic value of AF1279, AM1185, MP1338 and other uncollared offspring that may be in the area. AM1185 was born to the Middle Fork pack in 2009 and was not implicated in any livestock depredations prior to March 2014. AF1279 was captured as an established member of the Willow Springs pack during September 2012. Although this female was confirmed to be a Mexican wolf, parentage analysis of the animal has yet to be completed. Regardless of the pending analysis of AF1279, the IFT has determined that AM1185 has increased genetic value relative to the wild population. Offspring from AM1185 (e.g. 1338) would also have increased genetic value relative to the wild population, especially if AF1279 is not a descendent of the Bluestem pack. These genetic factors will be taken into account if removal of a wolf from this pack is considered appropriate.

4. The 1998 IMP considers the severity of the depredations and the number of times the wolf (or wolves) have committed depredations. AM1185, AF1279, and MP1338 were not previously implicated in any depredation incidents. However, during the past 365 days, AM1185 and AF1279 have been implicated in two depredation incidents, one of which included MP1338. These depredation incidents indicate a developing pattern of livestock depredation within the Willow Springs territory. In addition, the latest depredations have occurred on adult cows, at a time when wolf movements are not localized around a den and thus more difficult to manage using non-removal techniques. However, the pack is likely to den soon and non-removal techniques would be more effective during denning season. Our intent is to disrupt the developing pattern of livestock depredation behavior and to reduce the likelihood of additional depredations by the Willow Springs pack, which is a breeding component of the BRWRA wolf population.

5. It is important to retain wild-born wolves, particularly those that may be genetically unique, in the BRWRA wolf population. Because the Willow Springs pack is likely to den soon, natural rearing of the wild-born pups into adulthood is beneficial to the overall goals of the Mexican

Wolf Reintroduction Project. Further, efforts incorporating range riders, diversionary food caches, and intensive monitoring have somewhat mitigated depredations in other situations provided the wolves were tied to a den or rendezvous site.

Therefore, in consideration of these circumstances relevant to the situation and the efforts by the IFT in response to the depredations, and utilizing the flexibilities authorized in the 1998 IMP and Final Rule, my decision is that the Willow Springs pack, including all adults and pups, shall remain in the wild at this time. The combination of non-removal efforts that are being implemented in the area should reduce the likelihood of additional depredations. A range rider is contracted, and the IFT will continue to intensively monitor the Willow Springs pack and continue to stock a temporary diversionary food cache to reduce the potential for future depredations. I will reconsider the measures in this control order if additional depredations occur.

I wish to thank the Mexican Wolf Livestock Coexistence Council for their commitment of financial compensation to the livestock producers for past, current, and any future depredation losses. I encourage the IFT to focus on addressing field efforts and needs associated with the continued monitoring of the Willow Spring pack, with frequent reports conveyed to me through U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contacts and normal agency channels.

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